

# Learning How to Read

Contra Costa Gospel Church  
Adult Sunday School

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Text Before Event

We have spent a lot of energy recently dealing with the first major principle of interpretation, which is:

Synthesize the whole before you analyze the parts.

Ultimately when we apply this first principle to our Bible reading, we do so with the assumption that this is how the author wanted us to read it. And thus, by reading it with the big picture view mind first and foremost, we are approaching the author's intended meaning of the book.

When we apply this principle specifically to historical narratives (stories, events), we recognize that in order to understand properly the author's purpose of including a story, we have to take a big picture look at that story and how it fits into the larger narrative. Put another way, we arrive at our second major principle of interpretation:

Don't analyze the event in isolation. The event always has its place in the larger narrative.

Let's look at a few examples:

## 1) David and Goliath

Everyone knows the story of David and Goliath, down the very details of how many stones David brought with him to the fight (??), the kind of armor he wore (??), and even the weapon he used to cut off Goliath's head (??).

We have analyzed this story to death, and think that we know the author's point in telling us this story. What would that be? Why does the author include such a story? What is the point of the story? What is the moral principle of the story, if any?

The problem is, any conclusion that we may come up with regarding the famous triumph of good over evil, the little guy over the bully, etc., probably does not take into consideration how this story might be used in the larger narrative of 1 Samuel. Where does this story fit into the larger big picture view? And what purpose does including this story serve?

## Saul's Failures

The backdrop of the David and Goliath story is clearly Saul's repeated failure in leading Israel. How does he fail in these passages?

- 1 Samuel 9:15-21; 10:20-22
- 1 Samuel 13:1-14
- 1 Samuel 14:24-30
- 1 Samuel 14:52

All of his flaws seem to culminate in Saul's great failure in 1 Samuel 15:1-35. At this point in the narrative, it is clear that Saul is not fit to lead God's people and will be replaced by someone who is more suitable.

Let's stop for a moment and consider, who is writing this and to whom is it being written? It is undoubtable that First and Second Samuel were written together and meant to be taken as one unit. First Samuel begins with Israel in the monarchy, and Saul as her first monarch. Second Samuel ends with the conclusion of David's reign. What do we know of David's reign and its importance to the future spiritual and political stability of Israel?

**The purpose of the book is to engender a loyalty and devotion to the kingly line of Israel established by the Lord Himself – the Davidic Kingdom.** Thus, faithfulness to God's king on earth is in fact the same as faithfulness to the Lord Himself (e.g., from the movie, *Braveheart*, "An assault on the king's soldiers is the same as an assault on the king himself").

With this in mind, we revisit the main passage we are looking at in this lesson – David and Goliath. The characters in the story on the surface seem to be David and Goliath. However, who is David's real opponent? How does 1 Samuel 18:1-9 bear that out? And finally, if we know that the purpose of the book is to engender a loyalty to the Davidic line of succession, how does this story support that purpose (that is, what is the author's point of including this story in the narrative)?